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Women and the Roman Army in the Twenty-First Century

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Introduction

We are now at a critical point in our understanding of the intersection between the officers and soldiers of the Roman military and the women who spent part or most of their lives in the military environment as wives, daughters, and sisters, as free (citizen or foreign) or enslaved individuals. Traditional study of Roman military communities has ignored or erased (usually both) most of these women and their families from daily military life. As will become clear in this volume, the presence of women, children, and families within the forts and in the extramural settlements of the Roman army is beyond doubt, thanks to the diligent and sometimes contentious work of scholars over the last thirty years. Archaeological and documentary evidence reveals not only the presence of communities that surrounded military camps (as has always been appreciated), but also the inescapable fact that these extended military communities¹ interacted inside and outside the fort through habitation, commercial endeavors, and social obligations. As a result of being set aside in these exclusively external communities, women have been acknowledged as existing, but otherwise ignored – out of sight and out of mind. Not only have their social and economic contributions been disregarded, but even their identities have been overlooked.² It is now overwhelmingly clear that women can no longer remain invisible in attempts to better understand life in the Roman army at any level.

¹ All references to “military communities” refer to the combination of intra- and extramural communities inhabited by the soldiers and their dependents, following the sensible usage of Simon James (1999, 2001, 2018). We refer to the strictly intramural community as camps, forts, or *castra*. No distinction between permanent and temporary forts is necessary since throughout this volume all chapters addressing *castra* are concerned with permanent camps.

² Webster (1985: 209–11) is typical in discussing the extramural settlements (*canabae* and *vici*) without mentioning women or families. Although we could blame his reticence on the date of the first edition of his study (1969), it is worth noting that in his earlier work H. M. D. Parker (1928: 238) acknowledged that soldiers had informal wives. MacMullen (1984: 444–5) was atypical in acknowledging some of the contributions of the women, families, and camp followers. See Chapter 2 in this volume for historiography.

Nonetheless, the subject still requires a great deal of work, especially if we hope to illuminate not simply if and where in a military community these women resided and worked, but more importantly who they were, how they fit into the fabric of settlements, and what their contributions were to these communities. Despite its occasional appearance in archaeological and literary examinations of the Roman army and of ancient women, the topic of “women and the Roman military” as a comprehensive and sustained subject has not received a broad treatment that incorporates the extensive evidence available for debate. This volume goes some distance to fill this gap in our current state of knowledge by focusing on the lives and identities of women (and by extension children and other family members) who lived by the “call of the military horn” in different ways.

A primary characteristic of past dialogue on the topic was the need to prove first that women were present in the Roman forts at all and that they had an active role to play in military communities. The burden of proof was never placed on those arguing that women were absent from Roman *castra*. The marriage ban, together with the lack of wives’ presence on early imperial tombstones, were often taken as confirmation of authors’ preconceived expectations in favor of women’s absence. There are still scholars who doubt the presence of women inside the fort itself, except for the occasional occurrence of sex workers in a military environment.³ The resistance is a predictable response in the intensely conservative scholarly landscapes of Roman history and military history, but is no longer tenable considering the now abundant epigraphic and material culture associated with women in military contexts. It has become increasingly clear from a combination of evidence that women and children made up a significant proportion of residents in many military sites, particularly if one considers the fort and its attached extramural settlement(s) together as constituting a military community.⁴ Inscriptions, writing tablets, artifacts, and literature all point toward the regular and enduring presence of women and families in these intra- and extramural spaces throughout the

³ See, for example, chapters in Brandl 2008; D. Campbell 2010 for a review of arguments and rebuttals; most recently, see Breeze 2016: 93; Le Bohec 2017, 2020: 83–7, 180–2.

⁴ This volume does not focus on children as much as women, but this is an area that will need further discussion in the future. For current work, see Hölschen and Becker 2006; Hoffmann 2006; Greene 2014; see also Allison (Chapter 6) and Ivleva (Chapter 7) in this volume. The role of children in Roman society broadly is a growing subject but has not yet had sustained treatment in the military context. See recently and among many others: Laes and Vuolanto 2017; Carroll 2018; Crawford et al. 2018.

empire.⁵ This volume works from the premise that women were indeed active members of these communities and as such we explore the various roles and functions they played in the social, economic, and religious frameworks of military communities.

Military Women and the Roman Army?

Historians of Rome long maintained there were no women permitted in Roman forts. They generally argued that those women with whom soldiers interacted were restricted to the settlements near the fort (*canabae* and *vici*) where they had no role other than as wives, family members, merchants, sex workers, and enslaved women, and could be ignored.⁶ These obsolete assumptions are based collectively on four points: a supposed ban on women in the *castra*, a ban on marriage for serving soldiers, literary and epigraphic evidence, and historians' preconceptions and anxieties.

The presumed official ban on women in Roman forts is a mirage. Evidence for a ban is thin at best – intangible and insufficient. Reliance on the late antique etymologies of Servius and Isidore of Seville for the ban cannot stand, given the cultural distance between them and the Republican period in which they suggest the ban occurred. The statement in a first-century CE speech composition lesson (*declamatio*) by an author known as Pseudo-Quintilian, “women must not enter camp,” is untrustworthy as evidence since the declamations are part of a fictional rhetorical exercise set

⁵ Often students of the military assume when a woman lived in the military community that she necessarily performed a military role. It would be inappropriate to warp the Roman evidence to make it entirely military, such as leaping to the conclusion that the presence of women with military units means women enlisted as men and fought as legionaries or auxiliary soldiers in battle. This is the important difference in terminology between “women in the army” and “women and the army.” While there are records for a few women enlisting as men and fighting in early modern armies, there are no accounts of women in the Roman period enlisting and passing as regular soldiers. Given that Roman soldiers went through a physical examination and lived in tight quarters (Davies 1969, 1974) it is unlikely; it might have happened, but no source reports it. That is not to say women did not fight to defend their families and communities, but that is a different study in need of more attention. Rather, we find ancient women sometimes taking up command roles in the Roman world, but these are usually non-Romans like Cleopatra, Boudicca, and Zenobia.

⁶ For example, Watson (1969: 134–5). Breeze (2016: 93) suggests, contrary to the evidence, “It may be that civilians could have gone into the fort during the day though were excluded, at least in theory, at night.” In this assertion Breeze diverged from his 2015 publication in which he conceded that there were women living and working in camps. Or in the case of Holder (1982) and Webster (1985), they were just completely absent in their discussions, even of extramural settlements. This part of the historiography is discussed by Allison (2013: 12–19) and in Chapter 2 in this volume by Greene and Brice.

in the Republic and the statement is contradicted by a variety of contemporary literary and material evidence.⁷ The various exceptions to a ban, like Scipio's expulsion of sex workers from Numantia in 134 BCE or Germanicus' expulsion of noncombatants from Oppidum Ubiorum in 14 CE, suggest there was no formal ban. These are just two among numerous examples in our sources.⁸ The evidence, such as it is, collapses under analysis. Republican soldiers were called up (the *dilectus*) to serve or volunteered, leaving their families behind until their service ended. Legions existed only for the length of a war and usually made temporary forts on the march. More long-term legionary fortifications during the Republic were unusual, except during winter service away from walled settlements, such as during the Punic War and campaigns like those of Caesar in Gaul.⁹ Given the temporary nature of most fortifications a Republican ban on women in camps was unnecessary. Those authors maintaining that a ban existed well into the imperial period argue that officers' families were living in the *canabae* and *vici* outside the fortification walls, some of which were as much as a kilometer away from the fort.¹⁰ It is difficult to conceive of a commander visiting family in these settlements by day and returning to the safety of the fort at night while his family remained in an unwallled settlement. Besides, there is plenty of evidence, literary and material, that such a separation was not the case.¹¹ This imagined ban has provided an excuse for ignoring soldiers' and officers' families.

Further evidence that scholars have used to support a conclusion that women were not to be found in Roman military contexts is the ban on marriage for Roman soldiers during the first two centuries of the Principate. The inception of the marriage ban is agreed to have been one

⁷ Ps.-Quint. *Decl.* 3.12. Walters (1997) contextualizes the fictional declamation from which this line comes – a defense speech for a second-century BCE incident in Marius' legions; cf. Stoll 2021: 10–11. Le Bohec (2020: 87) is the most recent work to rely incorrectly on Pseudo-Quintilian as reliable evidence for a ban during the Empire.

⁸ Phang 2001: 124–8, for a comprehensive review of the evidence and historiography for this assumed ban from the *castra*. Cf. Serrati 2020: 123–4.

⁹ For example, Caes. *B. Gall.* 6.36–40.

¹⁰ Le Bohec 2017, 2020: 86–7. Parker (1928: 237–8), Watson (1969: 133–5, 140–1, and nn. 486–8), and Holder (1982) are typical of earlier works in which there was no discussion of where the formal and informal wives and families of officers and soldiers lived, even when the authors recognized soldiers made informal unions. Most general works on the Roman military published through the late twentieth century do not have index entries for “family,” “marriage,” “wives,” or “women.”

¹¹ On families in military communities see, in addition to the chapters in this volume, for example, Allason-Jones 1999; Phang 2002; Allison 2013; Ivleva 2017; van Enckevort 2017; Greene 2017, 2020.

of Augustus' military reforms, probably around 13 BCE. The existence of the ban is made clear by imperial rescripts that make an effort to lighten the burden of marriage legislation on soldiers and court documents that debate the illegitimacy of dowries associated with soldiers' illegal unions.¹² According to the ban, officers below the rank of centurion and all soldiers were denied the right of *conubium* – to make legal marriage (*matrimonium iustum*) – during military service.¹³ The reasons suggested for the marriage ban are several, including removing legal encumbrances to families during military transfers, limiting the possibility of competing loyalties, for masculine discipline, or for some mixture of all these reasons. The lifting of the ban was long thought to have occurred under Septimius Severus in 197 CE as a benefit to soldiers, but we now know the elimination of the marriage ban did not occur officially for all soldiers until later.¹⁴ This legal ban led some Roman military scholars to envision a quasi-monastic existence for soldiers.¹⁵

The perceived invisibility of women and their contributions in literary and epigraphic military sources reinforced the preconceptions of twentieth-century historians.¹⁶ Few women or families appear in literary discussions of the *castra* or the *canabae* and *vici*. Their presence as well as their contributions to the officers and soldiers with whom they associated were not perceived as important since writers and their audiences were more interested in the activities of officers. Even Roman authors' negative appraisals of women in military contexts were a tool to criticize the men with whom they were associated.¹⁷ The lack of women in literary sources about *castra* could be dismissed by skeptical historians as elite bias, which it was (in part), but the lack of epigraphic evidence, which was perceived as not necessarily reflecting the same elite bias present in literature, was taken as more trustworthy. Reviews of the evidence provided by tombstones suggested to some scholars that women were hardly present in early military communities.¹⁸ Even when women and families begin to appear

¹² For Claudius, see: Cass. Dio 60.24.3; Lib. Or. 2.39–40. For Hadrian see: BGU 1.140. For Septimius Severus, see: Herod. 3.8.5. On all these, see Phang 2001: 17–21, 38–40, and generally her work for the most comprehensive treatment of evidence for the ban.

¹³ On Roman marriage generally, see Treggiari 1991.

¹⁴ Stoll 2021: 5–9, 13–22 for the most recent discussion of the marriage ban, its likely reasons, dates, and historiography; see also Eck 2011, 2010/2014; Speidel 2013: 208.

¹⁵ For example, Watson 1969: 134; Holder 1982; cf. discussion in Wells 1989; James 2001: 80; Allison 2013: 12–19.

¹⁶ Speidel 2013. ¹⁷ See Brice and Tsouvala in Chapter 3 in this volume.

¹⁸ Saller and Shaw 1984. But tombstones are subject to many biases including a regional lack of epigraphic habit, culture, expense, mobility of legions, and random accidents of survival, for which see Mann 1985; Roxan 1991; Greene 2015a: 129–30; Klein 2017.

in the epigraphic record in greater numbers in the second and third centuries, there was no elaboration by scholars of their social roles (other than as wives and children) or their activities in military communities. The view of the *castra* as a “men only club” was thus reinforced.

The final component contributing to the presumed absence of women and their contributions in Roman military communities was the preconceptions and biases of modern historians of Rome. Many authors writing in the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century about Roman soldiers, officers, and camps were veterans themselves and accustomed to the exclusion of women from military settings. To them, military service was a “man’s world” alone. Their experience with military service colored their interpretation of the Roman past and gave it a modernist look.¹⁹ Even authors who had not served directly were familiar with the male domination of military activity. War, after all, it has been asserted, has been “one of the most rigidly gendered activities.”²⁰ Moreover, before the Second World War, most of these authors were also elite, not unlike the Roman authors on whom they relied.²¹ We should not be surprised, then, that elite individuals and activities – men and their doings – dominated the interests of these authors. And we should not ignore the fact that some modern historians simply do not respect or value historical topics associated with women. Such a blinkered and obsolete point of view can only do injustice to any effort to understand the complex reality of Roman military communities and society in general. The first three points – two bans and a bit of invisibility in the evidence – led to assumptions that were reinforced by scholars’ biases, which led to overlooking the potential for seeing women in the Roman military past and exploring their contribution. Although there were attempts in the 1960s (discussed in the next chapter) to demonstrate the presence of women and families, the image of a male-dominated Roman military persisted.

In reality, women had been present in military communities throughout the imperial period. Colin Wells showed decades ago that the notion of “celibate soldiers” was untenable and asserted that we ought to see the extramural settlements of military forts as legitimate and worthy communities from which wives were found and new military families were

¹⁹ Good examples of this pattern can be found in various studies that have tried to treat the Roman military as if it was organized in as much of a hierarchically detailed fashion as modern militaries, on which see Hingley (2000) and Lee (2020: 370–3), with bibliography.

²⁰ Ehrenreich 1997: 153, quoted by Phang (2001: 351, n. 34) and Wintjes (2012: 52).

²¹ Hingley 2000; James 2002; Allison 2013: 12–13.

created.²² The ban on marriage was rigorously enforced, but in the interest of morale, and perhaps efficiency, officers and officials did not ban informal attachments soldiers had with women. In addition to the legal rescripts and legislation cited previously, imperial diplomas issued from the reign of Claudius until the third century recognize that there were relationships between soldiers and women, some of which resulted in children. These documents granted soldiers on discharge the right (*conubium cum uxoribus*) to form a legal marriage.²³ These de facto or informal spouses are now generally treated as and referred to as “wives” despite their legal status. They were in nearly every respect spouses and they performed many of the same roles as would be expected of wives in the period.

Women were a part of the day-to-day operation of subsistence in the military community, whether present legally or with de facto status.²⁴ This aspect of female roles in Roman military communities is especially important considering that Roman soldiers, much of the time, would have spent a large portion of their service in and around the camp in mundane military activities including training, drill, and patrol, as well as the military chores of camp maintenance.²⁵ There were, therefore, roles for women to fill in supporting the daily operation of the community. Understanding the role of women and families is crucial for appreciating the success of the Roman army for such a sustained length of time.

During the Republic, when legions were raised and disbanded as required by conflicts, there was little development of military communities as such. But during the Empire, as military garrisons and posts became more fixed and forts and their associated settlements took on semi-permanent and then permanent architectural forms, long-term military communities emerged. The demarcation between military and civilian is, to an extent, blurred in these communities because the Roman military drew upon a variety of individuals, all of whom played crucial roles in supporting their associated units and were part of an occupying military force. In addition to the officers, soldiers, and auxiliaries, the supporting cast included craftspeople and artisans (blacksmiths, armorers, leather workers, weavers, etc.), grooms, suppliers, merchants, contractors, drovers, herders, and servants. The individuals who fulfilled the varieties of support

²² Wells 1989, 1997. See also Eck 2010/2014: 610–22, 27–39.

²³ On these informal relationships see Phang 2001; Dana 2014; Greene 2015a, 2020.

²⁴ James 2001: 80–1; Allison 2013 and Chapter 6 in this volume; Greene 2015b.

²⁵ The reality, often noted, is that life in the army was mostly mundane punctuated by episodes of combat. Various duty reports show that soldiers were assigned to tasks like making roof tiles, bricks, and hospital duties; e.g., B. Campbell 1994: 111–20; Zerbini 2014.

roles were part of the community, women as well as men, citizens and provincials, free and enslaved.²⁶ The study of conquest and occupation, which brings cultural change through both forced and adopted means, finds robust case studies in the Roman military stationed on the frontiers throughout the empire.²⁷ In order to gain a more complete understanding of the activities of military personnel, support personnel, and the workings of military spaces, it is necessary to investigate the social frameworks that underpinned military society and how they changed through time.

Research into the presence and role of women and children in the forts and communities of the Roman army is also part of a larger discussion of military sociology or the social history of militaries of all periods. As already noted, few literary sources describe the scale of women's presence in Roman military communities. Cassius Dio reports the presence of women and children in large numbers with the force of Quintilius Varus in 9 CE when he was marching in Germany.²⁸ They not only result in a long, slow marching column, but also contribute to difficulties during the infamous ambush at Kalkriese (or Teutoburg). It is clear from the presence of children that some of these women were connected with individual soldiers. Their reason for being along on the march is less important here than their presence. Similarly, Tacitus describes the women departing the camp at Oppidum Ubiorum in 14 CE as "a column," implying they were numerous.²⁹ There is little evidence from literary sources and what survives is largely uninformative. Archaeologically recovered material culture sheds more light, but these sources too can be difficult to flesh out.³⁰ Since our sources for the presence and roles of women and families in these Roman military communities are often limited to material culture it is helpful to consider comparative examples from other pre-twentieth-century militaries. A close look at militaries of

²⁶ James 2001. On enslaved persons with soldiers see Phang 2004; Linden-High 2020a, 2020b.

²⁷ Traditionally called "romanization," it is now recognized that this process of cultural change was unpredictable as it took different forms and played out at diverse rates in widely separated communities. See, among many others: Haynes 1993, 1999; Woolf 1998, 2003; Mattingly 2006, 2013; Versluys 2014 with extensive bibliography of the earlier debate on romanization and cultural change.

²⁸ Cass. Dio 56.22.1. Regardless of whether Dio mentions them to criticize Varus' leadership, their presence must have rung true for readers as a problem if the passage was to carry any weight; Greene 2020. Maxfield (1995: 146–7) has collected several additional passages on women in camps or on campaign, but such episodes are rare in our sources.

²⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 1.40–41. See also Quint. *Orat.* 8.6.42; Tac. *Hist.* 2.87, 3.33; Brice and Tsouvala in Chapter 3 in this volume.

³⁰ Allason-Jones 2001, 2013; Brandl 2008; van Enckevort 2017; Chapters 6, 7, and 9, by Allison, Ivleva, and Greene, in this volume.

the early-modern period provides reasonable comparanda allowing us to conceive of such a military as that which supported the Roman Empire and led to its success because of the presence of an extended support community, including women.³¹

In early-modern European armies and those of the pre-industrialized American West, for which we have good sources, the income and labor contribution made by wives and other family members were crucial for the subsistence of the household. The presence of women in early-modern military environments has been described as “vital” and that “armies could not have functioned as well, perhaps could not have functioned at all, without the service of women.”³² Military women undertook all kinds of tasks in and around these early camps, including making and repairing clothes, helping care for sick and injured men, foraging, cooking, comforting, writing, sex work, and plundering as opportunities permitted.³³ While it is true that these armies, unlike the Roman army, lacked enslaved persons to take on some noncombat tasks, these cases still provide a beneficial comparison of the contributions women made in military communities since we know many of the same tasks were carried out by women with the Roman army.³⁴

Historical analogy has helped to fill some of the frustrating gaps in our evidence but has not yet been exploited to any great lengths. One exception is a notable contribution by Elizabeth Greene, who compared the evidence recorded in letters between military wives found in the Vindolanda tablets to the extensive archive of letters sent from Elizabeth Custer describing in depth the lives of military wives and families living on the nineteenth-century American western frontier.³⁵ Her conclusions showed that army wives were as much militarized as the soldiers themselves in many ways, since their lives revolved entirely around the daily structure and activities of the army. Such analysis suggests that there are strong similarities between women in Roman military communities and those in some more modern military contexts.

³¹ Pre-industrial militaries are better comparanda because of their scale and because of the expansion of state supply in later militaries. By the end of the nineteenth century some militaries began to formalize the inclusion of women as nurses within the military, a process that accelerated and expanded in the world wars due to the increasing need for auxiliary support personnel (e.g., Wacs) to take the place of men needed for combat. See Hacker 1981: 670; Hacker and Vining 2012; Hagemann et al. 2020.

³² Hacker 1981: 644; also see Lynn 2008, 2012; Cardoza 2010.

³³ Hacker 1981; Lynn 2008, 2012; Ailes 2012. ³⁴ James 2001: 80–1; Greene 2015b.

³⁵ Greene 2012.

There are certainly fruitful avenues for future research using such historical comparisons that could be explored further.³⁶

The need to understand better the identities and social roles of women who were part of Roman military life is overdue. At the same time, although we might expect to find evidence of women in any military community this does not guarantee they were part of every military community in the empire, nor that they will always be archaeologically visible. Balance is struck in the discussions presented here by stressing that the evidence should not be employed to fill every military space with women and families where the evidence does not allow this conclusion with confidence. This volume does not seek to provide a one-sided conversation; chapters also address problems in our evidence and interpretive frameworks. This book will take its place in an ongoing discussion of the unique position of families in militarized spaces, both ancient and modern.

Present and Accounted For

As should be evident, the topic of women and Roman military communities has followed a familiar historiographical pattern. It emerged recently in the face of scholarly conservatism and concomitant resistance. Re-examination of overlooked or old materials, interrogation of assumptions, and methodological innovation by various scholars have brought additional supporting evidence to light, proven the presence of military women inside *castra* and other walled military spaces, and illuminated the lives of women in neighboring settlements. In Chapter 2, the editors review the historiography of the topic, demonstrating how it has changed over time and continues to grow. As some scholars and their students accept that the topic is a prospect not a threat, the field has expanded geographically as well as in terms of researchers. The increasing attention is provoking a realization of how much needs to be done and the opportunities afforded by the recent work.

Taking as their starting point the previous work that has demonstrated the presence of women, the chapters collected here seize opportunities to investigate and offer different insights into understanding Roman military women's associations, activities, and roles through such examinations as the social expectations of elite women in camps, as well as the tangible

³⁶ Also note the comparison by Zerbin (2014) between soldiers' letters preserved in the Egyptian papyri and letters home from soldiers in the First World War.

evidence for the lived realities of military wives and families at different social levels.

The society of a legion or auxiliary unit was not limited to the soldiers and their officers, but encompassed the support network associated with that unit, including the women in the military community. An ever-present aspect of that society was its hierarchies, both military (ranks) and social (status). Lee Brice and Georgia Tsouvala look beyond the stereotypes presented by Roman authors to examine the role and activities of one part of that hierarchy – elite women. In so doing, they draw attention to our sources and how, despite their limitations, those sources can be used to go beyond mere presence. Examining who Romans included in the group of elite women and the conditions that limit status in a *castra* (military camp, fort) reveals a complex Venn diagram of status interrelationships. Focusing initially on the career of Agrippina Major and augmenting those selective historical sources with analysis of literary, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence for other elite women, many of whom are named, Brice and Tsouvala reveal that elite women in military communities fulfilled the ideal activities of Roman *matronae*. Their conclusion may not seem entirely surprising, but it has not previously been fully appreciated, much less demonstrated. Their point is that the role of the *matrona* was not merely a Roman ideal but was how most elite women (and probably unnamed, non-elite women, too) acted and contributed to the military communities with which they were associated. Brice and Tsouvala argue that, as *matronae*, elite women support not only their immediate family, but, more importantly, the *familia* of the military.

The tension between the presence of elite women and their perceived transgression into the “male” and public spaces of the military, particularly during the reign of the emperor Trajan (98–117 CE), is the topic Sara Phang explores. Phang discusses adultery as a crime that not only violates Roman law and cultural norms, but also undermines discipline and command structure. She focuses on several reports of elite women who are accused of sexual misbehavior or gender role reversal in camp and how those reports reflect Roman anxieties regarding male honor, emasculation, and military discipline. She revisits the ban on soldiers’ marriage and the relationship between the ban and the maintenance of the military ethos.

There is no particular reason, in a consideration of Roman military women, that the periphery of the empire should dominate to the exclusion of the center. Although most of the work on the Roman military focuses on the frontier and provincial armies, military sites in the city of Rome were subject to the same forces of social organization as were military

communities in the periphery. The communities within the city may have experienced these forces of social organization even more acutely given the population of the capital and the number of soldiers gathered into the several city camps. Alexandra Busch and Elizabeth Greene focus their gaze on the wives and families of soldiers stationed in Rome. Readers do not often think of the Praetorians as family men, but some were. These individuals remind us that soldiers stationed in Rome were a diverse group having been organized into several kinds of units each with different duties, privileges, and camps, a pattern that is also reflected in the record of families and marriages, formal and informal. By examining funerary and dedicatory inscriptions, as well as recent archaeological excavations, Busch and Greene show that the soldiers stationed in Rome did have close relationships with women and some created and maintained families. This chapter highlights the vibrance and diversity of military communities in Rome and how these urban military women played some similar roles to those in the provinces including supporting the family and military community.

While discussion of elite women contributes to our knowledge of the complexities of military communities, the opportunities for growth and enrichment of our treatment of military women are even greater when we consider the non-elite women who occupied and contributed to various aspects of the military communities. But such women are nearly invisible in our written sources. Also, the archaeological remains of these military bases essentially lack the types of evidence for sexed bodies and gendered practices that can be found in burial contexts and in figurative artistic representations. Penelope Allison discusses in her chapter how more material-cultural approaches to the artifactual remains from such sites can be used to investigate gendered identities and lived socio-spatial practices in these contexts – specifically within the fortification walls – and to develop better understandings of the roles of such women in these hypermasculine spaces. Allison’s chapter demonstrates how an integrated approach to “gendering” artifacts using a range of different types of evidence – textual, epigraphical, representational, burial, and artifact assemblage evidence – can be used to explore the probabilities, rather than the certainties, of artifacts as gender attributes and as a means for developing more comprehensive approaches to investigating gendered relationships and gendered practices in Roman military sites. To this end, it demonstrates how analyses of artifact distribution patterns within these archaeological sites can be used to identify women who often are not identified through other media, and so seeks solutions to the difficult

task of identifying gendered behaviors in contexts that lack bodies, and in spaces which are traditionally considered to be exclusively male domains.

Material culture is also useful for tracking certain patterns of movement by military women. The marriage ban ensured soldiers did not make or maintain legal marriages, but it was not a celibate military and soldiers made informal “marriages.” We should not, therefore, be surprised that when a unit relocated the informal wives and families followed the men. These movements can be difficult to follow, but Tatiana Ivleva demonstrates that some of these familial movements can be traced through an archaeological perspective. Through the archaeological appearance of British-made brooches, which were regionally specific artifacts, Ivleva tracks the travel of wives (and families) from Britain to other provinces. The brooches Ivleva discusses were gender specific and made only in Britain, but they are found in selective Roman sites in Europe. Combining the pattern of their findspots with careful analysis of epigraphic data, Ivleva is able to trace the presence and movement of female family members from the archaeological perspective.

A substantial collection of sources indicates that women constituted a considerable part of the travelers in the first centuries of the Roman Empire, a period in which traveling became increasingly popular with various social classes. Lien Foubert also takes up the topic of military women’s travels, focusing mainly on women of lower status and in a distinctly different region from other chapters – Egypt. These female travelers left traces of their experiences en route in personal letters on papyri and ostraca, in graffiti and on votive inscriptions. Classical scholarship has long ignored these sources, even though they offer us a unique insight into female experiences and self-representation. Recent excavations on and near the trade routes in the eastern and western deserts of Egypt, along which units of the Roman army were positioned in military outposts, have uncovered letters in which women – most of them of lower rank – discussed their concerns about traveling from and to the military camps of their husbands, fathers, or brothers. When combined with other sources such as papyri and graffiti, these documents give insight into the mobility of the female relatives of soldiers in the Roman province of Egypt. They tell us something about the reasons why they decided to undertake journeys, the distance they covered (some while being heavily pregnant), where they stayed, and the dangers they encountered during the trip.

While women obviously filled a variety of roles and participated in diverse activities in military communities, one specific kind of role in which we can be certain they participated was religious activity in the

castra and nearby settlements. Roman culture made an active place for women in public and private settings. In addition to the household gods, which would have been private, there were numerous public religious roles fulfilled by women, such as participation in rites of the *Matronalia*. These and similar public religious roles could only be held by women. There is no reason to expect the religious culture of Roman military sites would have been so different. Elizabeth Greene examines a broad assemblage of material culture and inscriptions to reveal aspects of military women's religious roles. She shows that evidence for their participation in public religious ceremonies in military settings appears in inscriptions and dedications from an array of diverse provinces. Additionally, there is evidence of specific cults like the *Matronalia*, which was only officiated by women, having taken place in a military context. Greene shows that military authorities did not exclude women who were present from taking part and officiating when necessary. Among the auxiliaries as well as in foreign posts the military community embraced non-Roman deities, some of which included roles for women as priests and officiants. Anywhere there were families there would have been the private religious activities of households regardless of whether it was in the *praetorium* or another military or adjacent setting. The religious activities of women were not just about honoring the gods, but also carried important potential for strengthening cohesion within the military community.

The careers of Agrippina Major and Plotina demonstrate that from the early Principate most women, even the few imperial women who traveled with husbands in command, were not officially identified with the military. But in the later Empire there was a small group of imperial women, thirteen or fourteen, who have been assumed to have had an especially close official connection with the military – those who received the title *Mater Castrorum* – “Mother of the Camp.” First granted to Faustina Minor in ca. 174 CE by her husband, Marcus Aurelius, the title was later held officially by most of the mature Severan women, after which the title was employed unofficially by dedicants only occasionally until 308 CE when Galeria Valeria held it. Julie Langford and Christine Hotalen examine the *Mater Castrorum* title, the women who held it, and the emperors with whom they were associated in an effort to discern how emperors used the title. Drawing heavily on epigraphic and numismatic evidence as well as limited literary sources, Langford and Hotalen note that there was initially official granting of the title to several empresses, but that as time went on dedicants used it unofficially for several empresses who had not formally received the title. They identify several phases of the title's use as

propaganda, concluding that the title turns out to have not really been about the military or the women as much as about the orderly succession of dynasties initially and later about status and flattering honors. The title meant different things to different individuals and groups over time. Their examination of the *Matres Castrorum* reveals that the relationship between these imperial women and the military communities of the late Empire is inconsistent. Civic dedicants and communities, however, often employed the title in inscriptions differently than did soldiers. Those who received the title officially and unofficially were not so invisible in our sources as were most Roman military women, but the authors make clear that, as with so many other aspects of women and the military, the reality was more complex than has been appreciated in the past.

Women associated with the military still play a complex part in the literary sources for the late antique Roman world, but nowhere do they figure more than in Procopius' works. Scholars generally assume that Procopius, the noted sixth-century classicizing historian, was a notorious misogynist who belittled, even chastised, the impact that Theodora (empress) and Antonina (wife of Belisarius) had on the Roman Empire's fortunes in his notorious *Secret History*. At the same time, in the *Secret History* and the *Wars*, Procopius, both directly and indirectly, highlights the plight of women in the warfare that ravaged the eastern frontier, Africa, and Italy during the reign of Justinian. How, then, are we to reconcile the seeming hatred of, for example, Antonina in the *Secret History* with the apparent empathy of the suffering inhabitants of Italy in the *Wars*? Conor Whately explores through the gaze of Procopius the role of military women in the period of Justinian's reign at both the elite and the non-elite levels of military communities. In addition to Theodora, Antonina, and other elite women, Procopius details the plight of the common soldiery due to Justinian's penury which directly impacted their families. He also reports on the role of the soldiers' wives and families in the unrest that followed so soon after the conquest of Vandal Africa. Because Procopius is no more unbiased than any other source, Whately draws on an array of comparative sources, including the Code of Justinian, other sixth-century texts and papyri of Nessana, as well as the archaeologically recovered material culture of Roman fortresses such as el-Lejjūn. In the process he establishes the female component of what is generally assumed to have been still in Late Antiquity a wholly male space.

The women who lived, loved, worked, and died in military communities were numerous and diverse, as were their activities and contributions to their families and localities. It is not possible in a short book of eleven

chapters to cover all the ways in which women lived within the society of the legions, *auxilia*, and other units of the Roman military. This collection is an effort to demonstrate how much can be learned and how much more we need to do still. The military did not function in a vacuum; it was part of a larger society, even as it had its own society. The chapters in this book are not about how the army functioned in combat, but the topic of our focus is a significant part of why men fought – the families they left behind.

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